

Two principal marks of serfdom were specially grievous. The villein might not plead in court against his lord ; he had therefore no protection from the justice of his country against the man with whom he had most dealings. Above all, the villein could not sell his land or leave his farm without permission. In these days of dear labour, his lord was unusually anxious to keep him on the manor, while he himself was often willing to desert his unprofitable farm and better himself elsewhere as a landless labourer ; but even if his services on the demesne had been commuted, he was still a serf ' bound to the soil.' The economic condition of affairs must have lent special bitterness to this incident of serfdom. The social questions of the period cannot be understood, unless we remember that in 1381 more than half the people of England did not possess the privileges which Magna Charta secured to every ' freeman/

All great revolutions in the affairs of mankind have in them a mysterious element. Neither the philosopher nor the historian can fully explain the inspiration which suddenly moves a nation or a class, long sunk in mediocrity or servitude, to flash out for a space before the eyes of the world in all the splendour of human energy. The wind bloweth where it listeth. No one can account for the age of Pericles or for the age of Elizabeth, for the Jesuits, for Calvinism, for the French Revolution. We can tell their occasion, but not their cause. Sometimes a crisis calls for movement, and no movement comes. Why on some occasions there is an outburst of energy, why on other occasions there is no such outburst, is in each case a mystery. It is the modest task of the historian to relate the circumstances under which a movement occurred, and to describe the speculative or religious forms in which the ideas of the movement were presented. More he cannot do.

We have already set out the economic and social conditions of the Eising. It remains to indicate the ideas by which it was inspired. In that age revolutionary theories were as naturally religious as in the eighteenth century they were naturally irreligious. And so we find in this case. The idea of

¹ *Archæologia*, xxx, 235, note a, * Thraldom.¹